1 Samuel 2:26 And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men.

 Do you remember the history of Hannah? Hannah was the wife of Elkanah during the days of the High Priest Eli who would come to the temple and fervently pray that God would bless her with a child. One time, when she came, she was saying her prayers silently and Eli basically accused her of being drunk at the Temple. When Hannah told him she was just praying in her heart, then Eli blessed her and it was shortly after that that the Lord brought about the birth of Hannah’s first child, Samuel.

 What is neat about all of this is that Hannah had promised the Lord that if he gave her a son, then she would give that son back to the service of the Lord. As you recall the words of our Old Testament reading, note that such is what the words of our text are pointing to, to the fact that Hannah kept her promise. After Samuel had been weaned, he was given into the service of the Lord. Samuel went and lived at the Temple. Little Samuel served Eli the High Priest. It is clear that this Mom cared deeply for her child and yet, this child lived at the Temple and served the Lord, from maybe the age of three on.

 Well, that’s all fine and well, Pastor, but what is the point of talking about Samuel on this day of the church year. This is the First Sunday of Christmas. This is a day that we should be celebrating and focusing on the awesome gift that God has given us in Jesus. So why is it that this reading of Samuel is chosen? What does Samuel have to do with Jesus? How can we learn of Jesus with a text like this?

 Those are great questions. I will have to tell you that I wrestled a good bit with just what the point of this text was. Seriously, my first thought was that this text had been carelessly chosen. Yet as I studied and considered the Word of God, slowly but surely I began to see the shadow of Jesus. That’s right, I said, “The shadow of Jesus.” It is well known that many of the people or events of the Old Testament serve as “shadows” that is, they serve as little glimpses of what we can expect or what we will find in the life and events of the Christ, the Son of God. So it is with this text. Our theme for today will be: **SHADOWS OF CHRIST IN SAMUEL.**

 The first place I see a shadow in the life of Samuel is actually found in his mom. It is very clear that Hannah was a God fearing and very pious believer in the Lord and his love. I say that because remember that Hannah had a counter part by the name of Peninnah. Peninnah was the second wife of Elkanah and it is clear that Peninnah, because she had children, she did what she could to make Hannah miserable. And the history of this family tells us that Peninnah did this year after year. So it’s not like this is a one-time occurrence. Yet Hannah does not take her misery out on her husband or his other wife. She takes her troubles, her problems, her need for help and comfort to the Lord her God. In that action, it is very clear that Hannah is a pious and awesome example of exactly what a believing woman is.

 I think Hannah is a shadow of Mary, what we see in Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary is also a god-fearing and devout believer in the Lord. I say that because of the display of faith that Mary had. When Mary was told by the angel of the Lord that she was chosen to be the mother of the Son of God, please remember that Mary asked **“How can this be, since I am a virgin?”** Those words are so wonderfully telling. Mary was a virgin and it is clear with these words that Mary intended to stay a virgin and was letting the angel know that. When the angel told Mary, **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God…Nothing is impossible with God,”** again Mary’s response is telling. She says, **“I am the Lord’s servant, may it be to me as you have said.”** Here again is Mary stating that as long as this was the Lord’s doing, the Lord’s power in this pregnancy, she was fine. Again, a wonderful and pious young woman to serve as an example of faith and trust in God.

 The next shadow I see is in the numerous struggles that would be. For instance, don’t you think it was a struggle for Hannah to give up her son to the Lord as she did? Or take Mary, don’t you think it was a struggle for her, first to have to convince her fiancée that it was the Lord’s baby. Then there would have been the specter that hung over Mary and Joseph for most of their lives, that is, that they would have been branded as “adulterers” in the eyes of the people around them. Trust me, in those days and at that time, such a brand would make life difficult and a real struggle. Yet both parents endured, both parents took on this struggle all for the sake of the glory and wonder of God. That is faith in action and a great example for us. It makes us ask, “What struggle would you endure for the faith, the soul of your child?”

 Then take Samuel himself as a shadow. Samuel was given over to service in the Lord. Please remember that during this time Eli’s sons, as boys and then men, who were supposed to be servants of the Lord, were anything but. We are told they despised the offerings of the Lord and as men even began to use their power as Priests to sleep with the women who worked at the Temple. The indication is that this was forced or coerced upon the women. You can well imagine the dishonor and disregard people began to have for the ministry because of these wicked men, supposedly priests, and with one destined to be the High priest. That would have been the environment that Samuel grew up in. I can just imagine these men giving Samuel a hard time. For this young lad to stay faithful, to keep his focus on serving the Lord and doing what was right it must have been a real challenge. Yet, that is just what he did. And when the Lord finally reveals himself to Samuel, one of the first tasks he had was to once again affirm to Eli the judgment of God on him and his family for their wickedness. Samuel, though he was afraid, spoke the truth to Eli and from that point on Samuel is recognized as a prophet and spokesman for the Lord. Don’t take lightly the words of our text that say, **“Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with God and with men.”** Those words affirm the piety and strong faith of Samuel, a faith that strives for good and right.

 The same is also seen in the life of Jesus. What a struggle his life must have been. I don’t think we give that much thought. Here is the perfect Son of God who is living and growing in the sinful world among sinful people. When we are told about Jesus, **“we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin,”** we need to take that seriously. If you’ve been in my Bible classes we have spoken of this. How Jesus must have been treated by his fellow humans, neighbors, students, perhaps even despised and hated by his brothers and sisters just because he was the perfect Son of God, must have been difficult for him. The perfect God living in the completely sinful world. I have no doubt that Jesus’ schoolmates scorned him, this kid who made school work look effortless, who did whatever the teacher asked flawlessly and yet who seemed totally compassionate and loving toward everyone must have endured some pretty fierce teasing and troubles from his schoolmates. (You see, I don’t think kids have changed much over the centuries.)

 Or think about the brothers and sisters of Jesus, how they must have cringed and just seethed toward Jesus every time they heard their Mother say, “Why can’t you be more like Jesus?” Trust me, I believe Mary a good Mom but you know as well as I do that she probably said that. That’s just some of the difficulty that came as Jesus was a young lad and then into manhood. The depth of his struggle as the perfect Son of God living in a completely sinful world must have been astounding. Yet Jesus did it. Again don’t overlook what Luke states: **“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”**

 Finally there is the biggest shadow between Samuel and Jesus. Samuel became the leading prophet of God in his day. If something was going on, if the Lord was going to act and move you can bet that Samuel was deeply involved in it. The people benefitted from Samuel’s service to the Lord. Samuel clearly brought God’s blessings upon them.

 Yes, the same is true in the life of Jesus. Jesus clearly served as a prophet, THE PROPHET of the Lord. Jesus made clear the plan and purpose of God. Jesus made clear the salvation that God had intended and was now carrying out in His life. Jesus clearly served the Lord in such a way that people benefitted, yes, received from Jesus the blessings, the eternal blessings of God.

 By the way, in the days of Samuel, before God spoke to Samuel the Scripture says, **“The word of the Lord was rare in those days.”** If you think the word being rare at this time was stunning, then remember what we learn in the Bible. From Malachi, the last prophet until the days of Jesus there were four hundred years of silence from God. God hadn’t sent a single prophet at all during this period. And then comes John the Baptist! And then here comes Jesus. What an awesome message he had for us as he restores the Word of God to us.

 That message of course is the message of our salvation and peace with God. That message was not only taught us, that message was lived for us. That’s important to grasp. If all Jesus had done was tell us how God loved us, tell us about faith, tell us what we should do, there is no joy and hope here. Jesus doesn’t just tell us, he shows us. He shows us the extent of God’s love as He dies on the cross for sin. He shows us love as he declares from the cross, **“Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing.”** Those words were not just for the people then, but for us too. We are just as responsible for Jesus being on the cross. And when Jesus cried out, **“It is finished,”** what a pure marvel. Jesus telling us that sin was paid for, that complete and sure atonement was accomplished by his suffering of hell. And Jesus dying on the cross is not even the end of the story.

 Because the story doesn’t end. It doesn’t end because Jesus rises from the dead and in that actual and physical resurrection of Jesus we know that our redemption is won. There is no doubt. Jesus is God’s Son. Jesus is our redeemer. Jesus has promised that because he lives, we too will live. Yes, the work of redemption is finished. This work of redemption is now given to us. We are forgiven in Jesus. We are given eternal life in Jesus. We are made the children of God and heirs of eternal life just because of Jesus. And now I believe that we have the opportunity and ability in Jesus to grow in wisdom and faith, in favor with God and man. All of this in Jesus.

 Such is what I now see in this text and why it was chosen as a reading. Samuel, helping us to grasp the wonder of Jesus. Samuel, bringing God’s message to his people and Jesus being God’s message for each of us. Samuel serving the Lord and Jesus serving his Father and most important, serving us as our Savior from sin and as the complete gift of grace from the Father. Dear Father, help us to serve you by having the simple wonder of Jesus our Savior in our lives. Amen.